

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-15

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6683
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 RIO DE JANEIRO 4072

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, BR
SUBJECT: CHAGAS REGAINS POWER IN RIO DE JANEIRO; DUBIOUS
VICTORY FOR THE OPPOSITION

REF: BRASILIA 6928; RIO DE JANEIRO 2603

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. AS EXPECTED, FORMER RIO GOVERNOR CHAGAS FREITAS WON AN EASY VICTORY IN THE MDB CONTROLLED STATE ELECTORAL COLLEGE VOTING FOR GOVERNOR. THE MARGIN OF HIS VICTORY WAS IMPRESSIVE SINCE ALMOST ALL ARENA ELECTORAL COLLEGE MEMBERS ALSO CAST THEIR VOTES FOR HIM. CHAGAS HAS DURING THE PAST TWELVE YEARS CREATED PERHAPS THE MOST SUCCESSFUL POLITICAL MACHINE IN A MAJOR STATE IN BRAZIL. HIS SUPPORTERS OPPOSED THE MDB'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST GENERAL FIGUEIREDO. IT APPEARS LIKELY THAT CHAGAS, WHO CONTROLS A MAJORITY OF THE ALMOST ONE TWELFTH OF THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE WHICH THE RIO MDB COM-
PRISES, WILL SUPPORT GENERAL FIGUEIREDO IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS ALBEIT INDIRECTLY. IN THE LONGER TERM, CHAGAS HAS SET HIMSELF UP AS A PROBABLE LEADER OF A NEW CENTRIST, POPULIST POLITICAL PARTY WHICH IS LIKELY TO BE SUPPORTIVE OF THE GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

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2. AFTER INTENSE POLITICAL MANEUVERING IN THE MONTHS SINCE HIS NOMINATION BY THE STATE MDB PARTY CONVENTION IN JUNE (RIO REFTL), FORMER GOVERNOR CHAGAS FREITAS (1971-1975) EASILY WON ELECTION AS THE NEXT GOVERNOR OF THE STATE DURING ELECTORAL COLLEGE VOTING ON SEPTEMBER 1. CHAGAS RECEIVED APPROXIMATELY 90 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL POSSIBLE VOTES OF THE

COLLEGE (225 VOTES OF 252). HE WON THE SUPPORT OF ALL POLITICAL FACTIONS IN THE STATE EXCEPT FOR SEVEN ARENA DEPUTIES LOYAL TO GOVERNOR FARIA LIMA AND TWO EQUALLY SMALL GROUPS OF MDB ELECTORS, ONE FROM THE LEFT POLITICALLY AND THE OTHER CONTROLLED BY MDB SENATOR SATURNINO BRAGA, A BITTER POLITICAL FOE OF CHAGAS. CHAGAS' EASY VICTORY WAS A CULMINATION OF AN ELECTORAL STRATEGY DEVELOPED IN 1977, AIDED AND ABETTED BY POOR LEADERSHIP AND DIVISIONS WITHIN THE STATE ARENA AND BY THE ACQUIESCENCE, IF NOT SUPPORT, OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (I.E., FIGUEIREDO AND GEISEL).

3. FOLLOWING THE DECISION OF THE NATIONAL MDB LEADERSHIP TO PERMIT THE MDB TO CONTEST THE INDIRECT ELECTIONS AND HIS SUBSEQUENT NOMINATION BY THE STATE PARTY CONVENTION, CHAGAS APPEARED TO BE OPERATING ON TWO FRONTS. THE FIRST WAS TO SEEK TO EXPAND HIS INFLUENCE WITHIN THE STATE MDB BUT TO AVOID, AT THE SAME TIME, A RUPTURE OF HIS 1977 AGREEMENT WITH SENATOR AMAREL PEIXOTO, THE LEADER OF THE OTHER MAJOR FACTION WITHIN THE STATE MDB. WHILE SENATOR PEIXOTO RECEIVED THE PARTY'S NOMINATION FOR THE INDIRECT SENATORIAL VACANCY AND THE SENATOR'S CANDIDATE WAS NOMINATED AS THE PARTY'S CHOICE FOR VICE-GOVERNOR, THE AGREEMENT ALMOST COLLAPSED AS 14 MEMBERS OF THE PEIXOTO GROUP WERE EXCLUDED AT A SUBSEQUENT PARTY CONVENTION FROM RECEIVING NOMINATIONS TO RUN AS EITHER FEDERAL OR STATE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DEPUTIES IN THE NOVEMBER 15 DIRECT ELECTIONS. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE TWO FACTIONS HAD AGREED IN 1977 TO DIVIDE THE PARTY NOMINATIONS TO THE FEDERAL CHAMBER AND STATE ASSEMBLY WITH 53 PERCENT GOING TO CHAGAS AND 47 PERCENT TO PEIXOTO. SINCE SEVERAL OF THOSE EXCLUDED BY THE NOMINATING CONVENTION WERE WELL KNOWN LEFTISTS, IT WAS WIDELY RUMORED THAT THE CHAGAS CONTROLLED STATE EXECUTIVE HAD RUN THE PROSPECTIVE NOMINEES' NAMES THROUGH BRASILIA INTELLIGENCE SERVICES WHICH HAD VETOED THE LEFTISTS. ADDITIONALLY, CHAGAS ADVISORS ALSO BELIEVED THAT SOME OF THOSE EXCLUDED WOULD, IF PERMITTED TO RUN, WEAKEN CHAGAS CANDIDATES IN SEVERAL LOCALITIES. ULTIMATELY, THE STATE MDB EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, AFTER THREATS BY SENATOR AMARAL PEIXOTO THAT HE WOULD DECLINE TO ACCEPT THE INDIRECT SENATORIAL NOMINATION, AGREED TO REVIEW THE POSITION OF THOSE 14 EXCLUDED AND APPARENTLY SEVERAL WILL EVENTUALLY BE PERMITTED TO RUN ON THE MDB TICKET.

4. CHAGAS ALSO ATTEMPTED, UNSUCCESSFULLY, TO EXCLUDE INCUMBENT SENATOR NELSON CARNEIRO, AN OLD POLITICAL FOE ASSOCIATED WITH PEIXOTO, FROM A PARTY NOMINATION FOR THE ONE SENATORIAL VACANCY WHICH IS TO FILLED THIS YEAR (THE PARTY IS

RUNNING THREE CANDIDATES). CARNEIRO, A POTENT VOTE-GETTER, WILL PRESUMABLY ATTRACT SOME VOTES WHICH WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE GONE TO THE CHAGAS FAVORED CANDIDATE FEDERAL DEPUTY ARIO TEODORO, FORMER VICE PRESIDENT OF THE BRAZILIAN WORKERS PARTY. HOWEVER, CARNEIRO, WHO SUCCESSFULLY MANAGED BRAZIL'S FIRST DIVORCE STATUTES THROUGH THE CONGRESS AND WHO HAS THE SUPPORT OF THE MDB NATIONAL LEADERSHIP AS WELL AS PEIXOTO, ULTIMATELY PREVAILED AND RECEIVED ONE OF THE THREE SENATORIAL NOMINATIONS. CHAGAS' JOCKEYING WITH PEIXOTO WAS RELATIVELY SUCCESSFUL IN THAT IT APPEARS THAT HE WILL INCREASE THE NUMBER OF HIS FOLLOWERS IN THE STATE ASSEMBLY AND IN THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES IN THE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS RELATIVE TO THOSE OF SENATOR PEIXOTO AND IN THAT, DESPITE THIS MANEUVERING, THE OVERALL ACCORD BETWEEN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE TWO LEADERS REMAINED INTACT.

5. MEANWHILE THE STATE ARENA ORGANIZATION, IN DISARRAY SINCE THE 1976 ELECTIONS, WAS THROWN INTO EVEN GREATER CONFUSION: (A) BY THE GOVERNOR WHO ENCOURAGED ARENA CANDIDATES TO COMPETE AGAINST CHAGAS (AND FOR ALL THREE INDIRECTLY ELECTED OFFICES), (B) BY THE GOB WHICH WAS

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PREPARED TO ACCEPT A CHAGAS VICTORY IN ACCORD WITH THE

APRIL 1977 REFORMS, (C) BY OVERTURES FROM CHAGAS AND HIS LIEUTENANTS, AND (D) BY THEIR OWN PERSONAL CONCERNS ABOUT THEIR POLITICAL FUTURES. FOLLOWING FRESH CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE GOVERNOR AND THE PARTY'S LEADERSHIP IN THE ASSEMBLE OVER NOMINATIONS FOR FEDERAL AND STATE DEPUTY AND CONSUL-TATIONS BETWEEN THE STATE PARTY LEADERSHIP AND GENERAL FIGUEIREDO, THE STATE LEADERSHIP MADE IT KNOWN THAT IT WOULD SUPPORT CHAGAS. HAPLESS RETIRED GENERAL SYZENO SARMENTO AND RETIRED MARECHAL PAULO TORRES, WHO HAD BEEN ENCOURAGED TO CONTEST RESPECTIVELY AS ARENA CANDIDATES FOR GOVERNOR AND SENATOR, WITHDREW THEIR NAMES JUST BEFORE THE SEPTEMBER 1 ELECTIONS. IN THE FINAL VOTING, 92 OF 111 ARENA REPRESENTA-TIVES VOTED FOR CHAGAS. ARENA DEPUTIES LATER EXPLAINED THEIR VOTES ADVANDING, INTER ALIA, THE FOLLOWING RATIONALES: THERE WAS NO ALTERNATIVE CANDIDATE; THE MDB HELD A MAJORITY POSITION AND THE APRIL 1977 REFORMS CALLED FOR ELECTION BY THE MAJORITY PARTY; AND A DESIRE TO LINE UP WITH CHAGAS IN THE EXPECTATION THAT NEW PARTIES WILL EVENTUALLY EMERGE. SIGNIFICANTLY, ARENA ABSTAINED FROM VOTING FOR SENATOR AMARAL PEIXOTO WHO RECEIVED ONLY 156 VOTES TO WIN ELECTION.

6. MDB PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, GENERAL EULER BENTES,
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REACTED QUICKLY TO THE RIO VOTING BY STATING THAT THE PATTERN OF ARENA PARTY DISSIDENTS VOTING FOR THE OPPOSITION CANDIDATE (I.E., HIMSELF) WOULD LIKELY BE REPEATED IN THE OCTOBER 15 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. (THE RIO ARENA PARTY MEMBERS WERE SPECIFICALLY FREED FROM ANY PARTY LOYALTY OBLIGATIONS IN THE RIO VOTING UNLIKE THE SITUATION WHICH CURRENTLY PREVAILS CONCERNING THE OCTOBER VOTING WHEN THEY ARE SPECIFICALLY ENJOINED FROM VOTING FOR GENERAL EULER UNDER PENALTY OF LOSING THEIR PARTY MANDATES.) FOR HIS PART, RIO GOVERNOR FARIA LIMA STATED THAT THE MDB HAD BY ITS VOTE ENDORSED THE APRIL 1977 REFORM PACKAGE -- A DEBATING POINT OVERTAKEN BY THE DECISION OF THE NATIONAL MDB PARTY TO CONTEST THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. SUBSE-QUENTLY, THE GOVERNOR HAS POINTEDLY REFUSED TO ASSOCIATE HIMSELF WITH THOSE ARENA STATE DEPUTIES WHO VOTED FOR CHAGAS.

7. COMMENT: UNDER THE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENTS SINCE 1964, CHAGAS FREITAS HAS SUCCEEDED IN CONSTRUCTING WHAT IS PROBABLY THE MOST SUCCESSFUL POLITICAL MACHINE IN A MAJOR STATE IN BRAZIL. ALTHOUGH VAGUELY COMMITTED TO SUPPORT THE MDB PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, IT IS PROBABLE THAT MOST OF HIS SUPPORTERS VOTED AGAINST THE MDB'S DECISION TO CONTEST THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND CAST BLANK VOTES DURING THE VOTING NAMING GENERAL EULER BENTES AS THE MDB CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY. IT IS ALSO PROBABLE THAT THOSE ELECTORS IN THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COLLEGE

CONTROLLED BY CHAGAS WILL, IF THEY DO NOT VOTE OPENLY
FOR GENERAL FIGUEIREDO, EIGHER BE ABSENT FROM THE VOTING
OR CAST BLANK VOTES. ALTHOUGH EXACT FIGURES ARE NOT
AVAILABLE, WE BELIEVE THAT CHAGAS CONTROLS A MAJORITY OF
THE 49 MDB RIO DELEGATES TO THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE. ASIDE
FROM THE IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTIONS, IT WOULD APPEAR CLEAR THAT CHAGAS NOT ONLY
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HAS THE BASE BUT IS POSITIONING HIMSELF TO ESTABLISH A NEW
POLITICAL PARTY -- CENTRIST, POPULIST AND VERY LIKELY
SUPPORTIVE OF THE FIGUEIREDO GOVERNMENT -- WHEN LEGISLATION
PERMITTING FORMATION OF NEW PARTIES COMES INTO EFFECT.
THUS, HIS RETURN TO POWER ON SEPTEMBER 1 COULD WELL HAVE
BEEN A HOLLOW VICTORY FOR THE MDB NATIONALLY.

8. EMBASSY CONCURS.
DEXTER

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